

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Monday 29 February 2016

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Caroline Needham (Chair), Alan De'Ath, Elaine Chumnerly, Caroline Ffiske (Vice-Chair), and Donald Johnson

Co-opted members: Eleanor Allen (London Diocesan Board for Schools), Dennis Charman (Teacher Representative), Philippa O'Driscoll (Westminster Diocesan Education Service Representative) and Nadia Taylor (Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillors: Councillor Larry Culhane

Officers: Steve Miley, Richard Stanley, Baanu Baghbani-Irvine, Etiene Steyn, and David Abbott

CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed Vic Daniels, Chair of Governors at Phoenix High School and the newest co-opted member of the Committee.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Nandini Ganesh and Andrew Christie.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public questions.

5. ACTION FOR CHANGE - BREAKING THE CYCLE OF REPEAT REMOVALS FROM BIRTH PARENTS

Etiene Steyn, Action for Change Project Manager, addressed the Committee and informed members that since 2014, Action for Change had worked with parents coming out of care proceedings to help them make more informed choices and ultimately prevent future care proceedings.

Action for Change was supported by European Union funding, specifically aimed at improving the outcomes of survivors of domestic abuse who have had their children taken into care. Each of the member countries were testing best practice toolkits that would be evaluated by an external partner. The toolkits would be made available to Local Authorities following the conclusion of the pilot in December 2016.

Baanu Baghbani-Irvine, Action for Change Senior Practitioner, addressed the Committee and informed members that the clients (mostly mothers but some couples and single fathers) were supported through counselling and education to make informed choices. Practitioners worked closely with social services but looked at the whole picture including, assessments, court papers, and the client's own story and experiences. Key commonalities amongst clients were mental health issues, substance abuse problems, neglect, and domestic violence.

The majority of referrals to the programme came from locality team social workers, with a handful coming from housing and nursery nurses. Referrals had increased from 16 in 2014/15 to 30 in 2015/16 as the programme's profile raised.

During the period of the programme, 2014-15, there had been only one pregnancy, from a cohort of 6-7, and in that case the mother had made such significant progress that she kept the child. Using the average care proceedings cost of around £30,000 per child, the programme was delivering significant savings.

During the recent Ofsted inspection of Family Services, Action for Change were given special mention as demonstrating national best practice. The success of the pilot had meant that pressures were increasing. European Union funding for the domestic violence specialist ended July 2016.

Members asked why this work was not carried out before removal of the child. Baanu Baghbani-Irvine responded that pre-removal the work is focused on keeping the child in the family. The parents motivation was also different as they would do anything to keep their child. Steve Miley informed members that there was a whole range of services that worked with families to help keep children in the home and they had a good success rate.

Members asked if parents were able to get their children back following the progress they had made with Action for Change. Steve Miley responded that adoption was permanent, children formed attachments very quickly and the services were focused on the well-being of the child. Permanency had been the bedrock of childcare planning for the past 25 years.

Members noted that the programme seemed to be a perfect example of investment in early intervention saving money over the medium and long term.

Members asked if Central Government would supplement funding for the programme. Steve Miley responded that there had been no indication from Central Government but he felt the programme presented a clear invest-to-save case for funding as it would reduce spend across a number of budgets including legal and adoption.

Members asked if the programme, once embedded, could be tendered out to other boroughs to generate revenue. Officers responded that other similar projects had looked at providing quality assurance to other local authorities but at the moment they were just focused on providing the service.

Members noted that the young people in the presentation videos had received more than family support, they had received an education and developed emotional intelligence. Some members felt other avenues that helped young people develop (pastoral care, PSHE, citizenship classes) had been rolled back in recent years.

Members felt that more should be done to identify people that needed targeted support at an earlier stage. Steve Miley noted that Action for Change was an excellent example of being able to target a specific group and tailor services. Other services could use a similar model to predict need rather than waiting for referrals.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked officers and practitioners for their incredible work that had had such a profound effect on families in the borough.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee recommended to Cabinet that Action for Change be funded to continue their work supporting parents.
2. That Action for Change be considered as a model for future services.

6. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Ofsted Inspection

Steve Miley presented the report and noted the conclusion of the recent Ofsted inspection of Family Services. Officers had been informed that the outcome of the inspection was good, but there were some areas for

improvement including; the accuracy of tracking data, the recording of decision making outside of formal meetings, and helping the Committee to make good scrutiny recommendations. A draft report was expected shortly.

The Chair asked that the full Ofsted report be added to the agenda for the April 2016 meeting. The Chair also asked that the Committees congratulations and thanks be passed on to staff involved in the inspection.

7. CABINET MEMBERS UPDATE

Councillor Sue Macmillan, Cabinet Member for Children and Education, provided an overview of recent developments of relevance to the Committee. Since the previous meeting Councillor Sue Macmillan had:

- Met with Children's Centres managers across the borough to consult with them about building greater integration across a number of areas including Early Help and Public Health.
- Met with Parentsactive to get their views on the Children and Families Act.
- Attended the launch of the Youth Partnership, which represented a smarter way for youth services to be commissioned across borough. The Council was working with a wide range of organisations, including football clubs and theatres, to provide a better offer for young people.
- Attended the Passenger Transport Working Party meeting working towards a greatly improved service for parents and young people. For example, parents would now have access to an app to track the buses and see exactly where their children were as well as being able to get information about bus escorts and drivers.
- Met with a number of schools that were concerned about funding reductions from changes to pensions, national insurance contributions and a proposed revision to the funding formula. There had also been funding reductions from falls in the numbers of children receiving free school means. Officers were looking at the possibility of auto-registration for some families to help combat this.

Members asked when more information would be available on changes to the funding formula for schools. Councillor Sue Macmillan responded that the consultation had been delayed until after May but this had left schools feeling very uncertain. She had written to the Minister of State for Schools asking if he would meet local Headteachers to discuss the impact.

Members asked if, in cases where families had been rehoused outside of the borough, it was possible to understand the support process for a child leaving one school and moving to another in a completely new area. Councillor Sue Macmillan responded that she would consult with Councillor Sue Macmillan, Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, and provide this information outside of the meeting.

ACTION: Cllrs Macmillan and Fennimore

8. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015

Richard Stanley presented the annual school performance report that detailed the outcomes of the Summer 2015 assessments and examinations in the borough. He noted that overall performance continued to be above national averages and the proportion of schools judged to be good or outstanding continued to improve and was above the national average. Recruitment was highlighted as a key issue for schools and the Council was working with Headteachers on strategies to improve recruitment and retention.

Members queried why the percentage of young people in learning pathways was not 100 percent as they were required to be in education or educational training until the age of 18. Richard Stanley responded that some young people went into employment without training that met the requirements.

Members asked how the Council would measure and compare school's performance with the phasing out of national curriculum levels next year. Richard Stanley responded that there would be a significant change and schools were devising their own tracking systems against the national curriculum.

Members asked what the Council could do to improve teacher recruitment and retention. Richard Stanley responded that they were actively promoting H&F to newly qualified teachers. An event had been held for newly qualified teachers to meet with Headteachers from the borough and learn about the opportunities available to them. The Council was also advocating for teachers on issues such as key-worker housing and designated parking spaces.

Members asked for an update on the newly qualified teacher pool that had been raised at previous meetings. Richard Stanley informed members that the pool had been established and would make it easier for teachers to apply to local schools.

Members suggested officers look at data on how teachers moved through the pay structure to illustrate the chances of progressing in the borough.

Some members also suggested that teachers could be given Zone 1 and 2 travel cards. Councillor Sue Macmillan noted that social workers received similar benefits and this could be considered for teachers as well. She also noted that the Council had designated 12 flats as key-worker housing for teachers and the head of maths at Fulham Boys said he had stayed at the school because of this.

Members asked if there was an 'employee value proposition' for teachers in H&F. Schools could think more holistically about why someone would want to work there and be more creative about their recruitment strategies.

The Chair noted that schools in the borough continued to thrive and asked officers to think about some of the ideas raised to encourage recruitment and retention.

RESOLVED

That members of the Committee reviewed and commented on the school performance details in the report and the school improvement priorities identified.

9. WORK PROGRAMME AND OFSTED SCHOOL INSPECTIONS

The Chair requested that officers organised a Committee visit to Centrepoint accommodation for care leavers. She asked to meet with managers and residents.

ACTION: Steve Miley and David Abbott.

Members asked for the following items to be added to the work programme or prioritised:

- The DBS process and its effect on recruitment, including the costs of delays from the use of agency staff. The Chair asked for the Police to have an input into the report and attend the meeting if possible.
- SEN provision. Members noted that there had been a number of changes in legislation recently and it was a good time to look at the impact on schools and families. Members requested that SENCOs be involved.
- Skills for young people and careers provision. Members asked for the Youth Council to feed into this.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on 25 April 2016.

Meeting started: 7.00pm
Meeting ended: 9.20pm

Chair

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